

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

China cleans, locks away banknotes

AFP, Beijing

China is disinfecting and isolating used banknotes as part of efforts to stop the spread of the new coronavirus that has killed more than 1,500 people, officials said yesterday.

Banks use ultraviolet light or high temperatures to disinfect yuan bills, then seal and store the cash for seven to 14 days -- depending on the severity of the outbreak in a particular region -- before recirculating them, China's central bank said at a press conference.

The virus, which has infected more than 66,000 people in China and spread to more than two dozen other countries, has sparked a rush to disinfect public places and minimise contact between people.

Pharmacies across the country sold out of disinfectants and surgical masks in just days after a lockdown was announced in late January on Wuhan city, where the COVID-19 illness is believed to have emerged.

Fan Yifei, deputy governor of China's central bank, yesterday said that banks have been urged to provide new banknotes to customers whenever possible.

The central bank made an "emergency issuance" of four billion yuan in new notes to Hubei province, the epicentre of the outbreak, prior to the recent Lunar New Year holiday, Fan added.

According to the World Health Organization, COVID-19 can be spread through contaminated objects in addition to droplets and direct contact with infected patients.



A demonstrator hits the door of the National Palace during a protest against gender-based violence in downtown of Mexico City, Mexico, on Friday. Demonstrators daubed the words "femicide state" in blood-red on Mexico's presidential palace on Friday, before marching in heavy rain to the offices of newspaper La Prensa to protest against the recent publication of a gruesome image of a murder victim. The Valentine's Day demonstration, led by women, was sparked by the killing of 25-year-old Ingrid Escamilla in Mexico City and the publication of graphic photos of her mutilated corpse in newspapers.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Incredible fall from grace

The celebrity lawyer who represented Stormy Daniels, the porn actress who sued US President Donald Trump, was found guilty of extortion Friday in a Manhattan federal court. The conviction marks an incredible fall from grace for California lawyer Michael Avenatti, who at one point presented himself as a major adversary to Trump. Avenatti was found guilty by a jury of charges related to his attempt to extort millions of dollars from the sports apparel giant Nike. He also faces a slew of cases including for embezzlement, tax and banking fraud and identity theft. If found guilty of all the charges, Avenatti could theoretically be sentenced to several hundred years behind bars.

Stone seeks new trial

Republican political consultant Roger Stone requested a new trial Friday just days after President Donald Trump's criticism of his proposed jail sentence sparked an uproar over political influence in the justice system. The motion was sealed so his arguments for a new trial were not clear. Stone, part of Trump's successful 2016 presidential campaign, was arrested in January 2019 on charges brought by then-special counsel Robert Mueller as part of the Russia investigation. He was accused of lying in testimony to Congress about acting as an intermediary between the Trump campaign and WikiLeaks, which released hacked documents that embarrassed rival Hillary Clinton during the White House race. Stone was convicted on all seven counts in November, and was scheduled to be sentenced on February 20.



Who is Mexico's president?

He is the president of a top US trading and security partner but two of the Democratic candidates for the White House couldn't name the leader of Mexico. Asked in a Nevada election forum Thursday held by the Telemundo channel and the League of United Latin American Citizens, neither Amy Klobuchar nor Tom Steyer could recall the name of the leader of America's immediate neighbor to the south: Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador. Pete Buttigieg got it right but he didn't seem confident. The event focused on the issues dear to the 32 million Latino voters, many of whom have Mexican roots. Any US president has to spend a significant amount of time with his Mexican counterpart discussing trade, immigration, and drug trafficking issues.

SOURCE: AFP

Indoor ultra-marathon! Epidemic under control

Says China State Councillor Wang Yi, admits crisis a 'deep challenge', slams 'overreaction'

AFP, Hong Kong

A fanatical runner jogged the equivalent of an ultra-marathon inside his small apartment as people in virus-hit China desperately try to keep fit while cooped up indoors.

The country is at the centre of an outbreak of a new coronavirus, leaving more than 1,500 dead and sparking global alarm, but it is also in the grip of a health drive because the government is aggressively encouraging people to exercise to fight the disease.

With much of the 1.4 billion population ordered indoors and gyms closed, people are competing to outdo each other in how many bottles of water they can lift, how many push-ups they can do with their children on their backs or how many flights of stairs they can scale in their tower blocks.

But Pan Shancu has easily won the unofficial gold medal, saying he jogged 66 kilometres (41 miles) in a loop at home in six hours, 41 minutes.

He has the data tracker that he says proves it, and the 44-year-old's feat and a video of him repeatedly circling furniture in his apartment went viral in China.

"I felt a little dizzy at first, but you get used to it after you circle many times," Pan told AFP by telephone from Hangzhou, near Shanghai.

"Running is like an addiction. If you don't run for a long time, you get itchy feet."

On another occasion Pan ran 30 kilometres on the spot in his bathroom and live-streamed it to inspire others who have similarly been confined at home for the last two weeks.

China's ruling Communist Party has launched a campaign featuring Olympic athletes to demonstrate how people can stay fit while spending endless days stuck inside.

Bilibili, a popular video-sharing platform, says views of fitness-related content jumped nearly 50 percent in the period January 23 to February 5 compared to the two weeks before.



REUTERS, Berlin

A top Chinese official acknowledged that the new coronavirus is a deep challenge to the country, but defended Beijing's management of the epidemic while lashing out at the "overreaction" of other countries.

In a wide-ranging interview with Reuters in the German capital, State Councillor Wang Yi, who also serves as China's foreign minister, urged the United States not to take unnecessary virus-response measures that could hamper trade, travel and tourism.

"The epidemic overall is under control," he said. "This epidemic is truly sudden. It has brought a challenge to China and the world."

"We've taken such complete prevention and control efforts, efforts that are so comprehensive, that I can't see any other country that can do this," Wang said, adding that any leader in another country would find the challenge very difficult.

"But China has been able to do this."

Beijing has criticised the United States in particular for taking drastic measures on coronavirus, which have included travel curbs on



visitors from China. The United States was the first to announce it was evacuating citizens from Wuhan, the city at the epicentre of the virus outbreak.

"Some countries have stepped up measures, including quarantine measures, which are reasonable and understandable, but for some countries they have overreacted, which has triggered unnecessary panic," he said.

"I'm sure that those countries are reflecting on this as the situation evolves and the epidemic is gradually brought under further control," he said. "They will gradually release such restrictions. Because at the end of the day, these countries need to interact with China."

"We're not just defending the life, safety and health of Chinese citizens, but also making our contribution for global public health, and that should be recognised," he said.

Beijing has urged countries to ease travel restrictions and resume flights after numerous airlines stopped flying to China.

"Only under the leadership of President Xi can we control this sudden epidemic, which has spread so quickly. This is not only to defend the health of the Chinese people, but also will prevent the rapid spread of this epidemic in the world," he said.

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